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The Critique of Christianity in Celsus and Nietzsche: From Sedition to Resentment

Abstract: Celsus of Alexandria's second-century invectives against the politics and culture of Christianity share prominent features with the problem of *ressentiment* as it emerges in Nietzsche's analysis of Christianity as characterized by feelings of revenge and hatred. Against this background, it is possible to suggest that Nietzsche's views of Christianity continue Celsus's much earlier criticism of Christianity. This pertains especially to the relationship between Church and state, since the Church tends to impose itself on issues that fall within the purview of the secular state. Both Celsus and Nietzsche, thus, highlight the subversive nature of Christianity in their respective critiques, and it is thus subversive nature of Christianity's relationship to the state that can be seen as a trigger of the *ressentiment* described by Nietzsche.

Keywords: Celsus of Alexandria, Christianity, Kingdom of God, Resentment

Introduction

Celsus of Alexandria is a highly relevant author for Nietzsche's ethical-political critique of Christianity. In his writings, Celsus conducts a political and cultural analysis of the essence of Christianity, noting how these elements influence the history of the Christian religion. *The Song of Mary*, for instance, exemplifies a morality of subversion to an established order of power. Thus, we can see how order and institutions stand in opposition to the essence of what is seen to be genuinely Christian.

Celsus of Alexandria, a Roman name, wrote in Greek. He was well-versed in Platonic philosophy, greatly interested in the religious and social phenomena of his time, and devoted to the legal order of the state. It is likely that his main work, Αληθης Λογος, or *The True Doctrine*, was written around 178, although most of the latter we only know through Origen of Alexandria's later criticism in *Contra Celsum*.[1] Celsus denied the

1 In his *Manual of Patrology*, Hubertus Rudolf Drobner reports: "The Alexandrian Platonist Celsus composed around 178 a polemical work titled Αληθης Λογος against the Christians" (Hubertus Rudolf Drobner, *Manual de Patrologia*, trans. Orlando dos Reis and Carlos Almeida Pereira, Petrópolis 2002, 74). *Against Celsus* was written in the third century by Origen of Alexandria (185–253). Little is known about Celsus' identity. Origen informs us only that he was a pagan philosopher. Historical records mention

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Nietzsche-Studien 54 (2025), 221–241 Published online Juli 26, 2025

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divinity of Jesus, the descent of God into the world, and faith in divine providence, all of which he regarded as absurd. For Celsus, Christianity was a religion of depravity and sedition, constituting a constant threat to the state. In his writings, Celsus emerges as a highly polemical figure, criticizing how Christianity pitched itself as a new faith against the philosophy and politics of the state. He is considered a religious pagan with a Platonic disposition. He accused Christianity of introducing a schism within the Roman Empire. Celsus is seen as a conservative nationalist, viewing some of the main tenets of Christianity as a crude imitation of Greek philosophy, especially Socrates and Plato, which was devoid of anything new and, indeed, deforming Greek philosophy. Furthermore, he criticizes Christianity for being characterized by "magic," as he himself expressed: "After all, it was through magic that Jesus himself was able to perform those miracles that people believed he accomplished."[2] Christians contradict reason itself by attributing faith to ascetic priests who deceive their followers.

However, these followers of the Christian faith are not trained to question. Rather, they should "not inquire, but 'have faith' and 'your faith will save you.' And they add: 'The wisdom of the world is evil, madness is good'."[3] In other words, everything lowly and weak becomes good, and everything high and noble becomes evil. Therefore, motivated by a apparently degenerate psychology, "it is the psychology of Christianity; the birth of Christianity from the spirit of resentment, not from the 'spirit,' as believed – an antimovement in its essence, the very revolt against the domination of noble values" (EH, GM).[4] Everything that is considered high, strong, and biologically and psychologically healthy ends up being seen as dangerous and disturbing to the established order. "The one who, to Christians, was their leader introduced, a few years ago, this designation and was considered by Christians to be the son of God. Thus, they were deceived and maintained a corrupt conception of human life."[5] Christians are depicted as vulgar and incapable of interpreting allegories. However, Celsus does recognize how the Christian movement continues to grow, with important figures emerging, such as the apologist and martyr Justin. In the context of the ancient world, Christianity presents itself as a mass movement, gaining significant cultural and political influence. This religious mass movement, according to Celsus, imposes itself from the beginnings of the first communities as a subversive movement on the entire established social and

two Epicurean philosophers named Celsus – one lived during the reign of Nero and another during Hadrian's reign. However, it remains uncertain which of these individuals authored the text referenced by Origen.

2 Celsus, *On The True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffmann, Oxford 1987, 1,6b, 65.

3 Celsus, *A Discourse Against the Christians*, 1,9, 69.

4 All English translations of Nietzsche's texts have been taken from the Stanford University Press edition of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*. All other English translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

5 Celsus, *A Discourse Against the Christians*, 1, 26c and d, 77–9.

political order, which was also emphasized by Nietzsche. This subversion, which leads to an uprising of the masses, is oriented toward the Kingdom of Heaven, interpreted as the Kingdom of God, before which everything else, namely, whatever is seen to belong to the world, is considered worthless. This disdain for the world is eventually translated into a guilty conscience, but also into resentment toward those who are devoted to the world.

Nietzsche's possible knowledge of Celsus is only speculation, since there are no direct mentions of Celsus in his writings, nor is there any mention of Origen's rejection of Celsus's views. However, Nietzsche's writings reveal several references to authors from the patristic period of late antiquity, such as Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Augustine's thought understands the human being as a union of two metaphysically distinct substances: body and soul, with the soul being superior to the body, which mirrors Origen's earlier defense of the pre-existence of the soul. It might be possible that Nietzsche had some knowledge of Celsus and Origen through Augustine. At least, in the following passage from Nietzsche's notebooks, it is possible to note some aspects that are similar to both Celsus and Origen: the Christian prerogative of the soul over the body. "Paul, Augustine, Luther – the barbarization of Christianity by the Germanic tribes: the interdivine beings [*zwischengöttliche Wesen*] and the multiplicity of expiatory cults, in short, the pre-Christian point of view returns" (Nachlass 1885/86, 1[5], KSA 12.12). Another passage that highlights Nietzsche's interest in these authors from the first centuries of Christianity refers to Justin and appears in a letter addressed to Franz Overbeck dated June 22, 1880, in which he writes: "namely, Lüdemann's Anthropology of Paul and the book on Justin, which you have often mentioned to me. Then I would like Wackernagel's printed essay on the Brahmins and his other (unpublished?) one on Buddhism. Do you see it occasionally?" (no. 33, KSB 6.23).

The following discussion unfolds in three stages. It begins with an overview of how Celsus interprets various subversive manifestations of Christianity, examining how this movement, led by the community that inherited the teachings of its master, has positioned itself against the established order. I will connect Celsus's analyses of the Christians' stance toward the established order to Nietzsche's reading of how the Christian uprising takes form. In a second step, I will examine one particular aspect through which Christians claim supremacy over the established social and political order, that is, the appeal to the "Kingdom of God." Focusing on this expression, both Celsus and Nietzsche criticize Christianity, accusing it of abandoning and rejecting the world of life. Finally, in a third step, I will turn my focus on the question what it means, psychologically speaking, to deny the world and all that belongs to it: resentment.

I The Uprising of Christians in Celsus and Nietzsche

Subversion, as analyzed by Celsus, is seen as a counterforce; it is inspired by a sense of weakness that proves unable to confront and therefore subverts. It manifests itself in the feeling of resentment that is oriented toward the past, a feeling that repeats itself again and again. Celsus's and Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity converges in the "herd," since both revolt and resentment are features of herd morality. They are characteristic of those who, incapable of fighting, hide behind a subterfuge expressed in mass revolt and in a manifestation of hatred and resentment. Eugen Fink shows that Christianity begins through the slave revolt which itself can be seen as the beginning of morality.[6] Resentment as a retrospective feeling of revenge is considered so powerful that

> no flame devours as quickly as the affects of resentment. Annoyance, sickly susceptibility, impotence for revenge, desire, thirst for revenge, churning poison in all senses – for the exhausted, this is certainly the most harmful form of reaction: it produces a rapid depletion of nervous energy, a sickly increase in harmful secretions, of bile in the stomach, for instance. Resentment is forbidden in itself for the sick – their harm: unfortunately, also their most natural inclination (EH, Wise 6).

Celsus, thus, views Christianity's subversion of the state as a counterforce that prevents the state from affirming itself as the sphere of civil law and as the main force of social organization: "Christians are accustomed to form secret associations among themselves against the laws. These associations therefore constitute a transgression of the common law."[7] Only resentment can arise from such associations, which makes those who experience resentment suffer the most:

> Resentment, born of weakness, harms no one more than the weak themselves – in the other case, it presupposes a rich nature, a superfluous feeling, one whose control is almost proof of wealth. Anyone who knows the seriousness with which my philosophy pursued the struggle against feelings of revenge and resentment, even within the doctrine of "free will" – the struggle against Christianity is only a particular case of it – will understand why I highlight here my personal stance, my instinctual security in practice (EH, Wise 6).

Christianity, according to Celsus, can be considered to be an association that unites against civil law in a clandestine way: "The Christians are accustomed to have private assemblies, which are forbidden by the law."[8] Based on a higher power, Christianity arrogates to itself the right to transgress common law. This transgression concerns the notion of revolution which Nietzsche sees as inspired by resentment. Such transgression is associated with a pathological feeling which is an "incapacity to act and react to stim-

6 Eugen Fink, *A Filosofia de Nietzsche*, trans. Joaquim Loureço Duarte Peixoto, Lisbon 1988.
7 Celsus, *A Discourse Against the Christians*, 1,1, 61.
8 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, trans. Thomas Rodd, London 1830, 1.

ulation."[9] This inability to act is linked to resentment. According to Guy Elgat, resentment is triggered by a feeling of injustice.[10] In this sense, the Christian community, or association, is comparable to the Socratic stance of ceasing to follow teachings and laws, so that Christianity can be considered a movement of the "mediocrity of human beings that began with Socrates and Christ."[11] Christians express such mediocrity also by never explaining the content of what they believe: "Some of these are not willing either to give or receive a reason for what they believe: but are accustomed to say, 'Do not investigate, but believe, your faith will save you'."[12] As Domenico Losurdo notes with regard to the crisis of culture, "the liquidation of modernity, at once utilitarian and destructive, began with Socrates."[13] Nietzsche likewise criticized Socrates for his spirit of revolt, and thus for his resentment toward the established order and law:

> Is Socrates' irony an expression of revolt? Of plebeian resentment? Does he, as an oppressed person, enjoy his own ferocity in the thrusts of syllogism? Is he taking revenge on the noblemen he captivates? – As a dialectician, one holds an unyielding instrument in hand; one can play the tyrant as he does, exposing the other in conquering them, the dialectician leaves to his opponent the task of proving that he is not an idiot: he enrages, he simultaneously despairs. The dialectician takes away the power of the adversary's intellect – how? Is dialectic in Socrates just a form of revenge? (TI, Socrates 7)

The Christian doctrine represents no innovation, however, neither in its ethical aspect nor in the worship of images. There is no higher teaching, nor anything new, in Christianity, because its doctrine is derivative of other thinkers, such as Plato[14] and Seneca. And since Christianity is petty and filled with anger, it also lacks in virility, or strength:

> Nothing virile in it; full of petty anger toward all virile spirits. It roams around, subtle, curious, bored, prying – in essence, a personality of a woman, with feminine greed for revenge and feminine sensuality. As a psychologist, a genius of médisance [slander]; inexhaustibly rich in means for it, no one knows, like him, how to mix poison and praise. Plebeian in the lowest instincts, and related to Rousseau's resentment, therefore romantic – for under all romanticism growls and yearns Rousseau's instinct for revenge (TI, Skirmishes 3).

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9 Vânia Dutra de Azeredo, "Ressentimento (Ressentiment)," in Scarlett Marton (ed.), *Dicionário Nietzsche*, São Paulo 2016, 364–6: 365.

10 Guy Elgart, *Nietzsche's Psychology of Ressentiment: Revenge and Justice in "On the Geneaology of Morals"*, London 2017, 180.

11 Ingrid Flórez Fortich, "Nietzsche's *Übermensch*: The Notion of a Higher Aristocracy of the Future," *Civilizar* 10/18 (2010), 75–80: 76.

12 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 2.

13 Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche e a Crítica da Modernidade*, trans. Alessandra Siedschlag, São Paulo 2016, 21.

14 See Drobner, *Manual de Patrologia*, 156: "Fully recognized the Christian doctrine of the Logos, which could easily be harmonized with the Platonic or syncretic philosophy of the time, as well as its elevated morality and exemplary conduct of life, which would also be a goal of true philosophy."

This schism comes to the fore not only in a religious dimension but also in the spiritual and instinctual dimensions of lived experience. As such, one forgets that

> the deepest instinct of life, oriented toward the future of life, the eternity of life, is felt religiously – it is the very path to life, procreation as a sacred path … Only Christianity, with its fundamental resentment against life, made sexuality something impure: defiling the beginning, the presupposition of our life (TI, Ancients 4).

Nietzsche's critique of the divinity of Jesus is denouncing everything that the latter directs against life. Yves Ledure has a highly suggestive reflection on this issue: "The type Jesus, created by Nietzsche, paves the way leading to the advent of the divine. This faces a threefold condition: suppression of sin, the Kingdom of God in the heart, and a way of life."[15] These three conditions place Jesus diametrically in opposition to Judaism. Jesus as a Jew is nothing but a deserter from Judaism, as are Jewish Christians. Jesus was a great transgressor of Jewish law. Contrary to this interpretation, Celsus presents Jesus and the Christians not as a corruption of Judaism, but rather as its consequence:

> Though we do not believe in the ancient fables, which ascribe a divine origin to Perseus, Amphion, Æacus, and Minus, yet at the same time their deeds are demonstrated to be mighty and admirable, and truly super-human, in order thar what is narrated of their origin may not appear to be improbable. But (speaking to Jesus) he says: "What beautiful or admirable thing have you said or done, though you ware called upon in the temple to give some manifest sign that you were the son of God?"[16]

> He is not a movement against the Jewish instinct, he is its own consequence, one more inference in its terrifying logic […], in everything that on earth triumphed, power, beauty, self-affirmation, the instinct of resentment, here turned into genius, had to invent another world, from which the affirmation of life appeared as bad, as condemnable in itself (A 24).

Once again, we can confirm how Nietzsche distances himself from Celsus's interpretation of Jesus as an example of revolt against Judaism:

> In that moment they felt themselves in revolt against the order, they understood Jesus, in retrospect, as in revolt against the order. Until then, their picture lacked this warrior trait, a characteristic of saying no, doing no, more the contrary. Clearly the small community did not understand the main point, what was exemplary in this way of dying, the freedom, the superiority over all feeling of resentment: a sign of how little they understood him (A 40).

Celsus recognizes in the miracles performed by Jesus actions that occur through magic, that is, actions that do not demonstrate his divinity. Attracted to those who followed him, Jesus clearly did not command with the authority of a valiant general. Celsus there-

15 Yves Ledure, *Nietzsche et la Religion de l'Incroyance*, Paris 1973, 175.
16 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 7.

fore also finds no support for the divinity of Jesus[17] in the idea that, from the beginning, Jesus knew about the Passion of Christ, his way of sorrow and suffering. The latter, the Passion of Christ, was nothing but a fantasy of Jesus's disciples.

It is nonsensical to believe that the Son of God must ascend into heaven. Rather, the foundation of Christian religion is rebellion and a coercive denial of reason, which makes it the opposite of Buddhism:

> Prayer is excluded, as well as asceticism, no categorical imperative, no coercion whatsoever, even within the monastery (– one can leave it –). All these would be means to strengthen that enormous excitability. Precisely for this reason, it also does not ask that we combat those who think differently; nothing is more opposed to its doctrine than the feeling of revenge, of aversion, of resentment (– "enmity does not end enmity": the moving refrain of all Buddhism) (A 20).

To attract followers, Christians misinterpreted ancient conceptions of conscience to trigger fear and terror, finally also refuting scientific reason:

> When the center of gravity of life is placed not in life but in the "beyond" – in nothingness – life is stripped of its center of gravity. The great master of personal immortality destroys all reason, all nature in the instinct – all benefit-promoting, future-guaranteeing qualities in the instincts become suspect (A 43).

Christians blindly surrender to God, repeating that everything is possible with God, affirming a definitive life in His Kingdom. But what are the implications of defending the advent of this Kingdom?

II Celsus and Nietzsche and Their Assaults on the Christian Notion of the "Kingdom of God"

Nietzsche criticizes the creation of the idea of a supernatural Kingdom of God[18] as the strongest expression of revenge in response to the death of Jesus; for Tobin Siebers, "'Resentment' is only the most recent word for revenge, and the problem of revenge enters the ethical tradition at its inception,"[19] thus, as an anti-gospel:

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17 As Drobner puts it: "The Judeo-Christian figure of a Messiah, and his personification in Christ, seemed to him utterly ridiculous. Christ would be merely a charlatan and sorcerer, and his apostles would have merely invented the myth of his resurrection. In comparison with this, the philosophical faith of the Greeks in God seemed to him, in rationality, far superior to Christianity" (Drobner, *Manual de Patrologia*, 156–7).

18 Anything that goes beyond this world evokes an idealistic vision, highly criticized by Nietzsche, or as Aaron Ridley noted: "Nietzsche's objection to idealism is not merely that it falsifies the world – by claiming that there is a God, for example, or that freedom in the 'metaphysical superlative sense' is possible" (Aaron Ridley, "Nietzsche: *The Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo*, *Twilight of the Idols*," in Robert B. Pippin (ed.), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, Cambridge 2012, 215–39: 227).

19 Tobin Siebers, *The Ethic of Criticism*, New York 1988, 124.

> But his disciples were far from forgiving this death – which would have been evangelical in the highest sense, or even offering themselves to a similar death with gentle and calm peace in their hearts … Precisely the most un-evangelical sense: revenge once again prevailed. This matter could not end with that death: "reparation" and "judgment" were needed (– and what could be less evangelical than "reparation," "punishment," "bringing to judgment"!). Once again, the popular expectation of a Messiah came to the forefront; a historical moment was seen: the "Kingdom of God" will judge its enemies (A 40).

For the masses, the "herd," whatever is seen as evil does not originate in God but in the material world. The opposition between God and the material world thus is responsible for the moral denigration of nature: "the opposition between a noble morality and a chandala morality born of resentment and impotent revenge" (A 45). From beginning to end, morality ensures that the entire cycle of events is marked by determinism. For this reason, "removing moral values from the place of a higher value, which dominates and gives meaning to all values, will only be possible by destroying this value instituted by morality itself."[20] Or as Celsus noted: "Good and evil, in the moral sphere, can neither diminish nor increase, nor does God feel the need for further correction, because they do not operate in a correct and perfect manner, as a man would when making something."[21] The Christian idea of angels and demons has fostered a corruption of Greek thought. The worship practices of all peoples are valid, and, for that reason, those of the Hebrew tradition cannot be considered superior to the others. The Christian god is the god of magic, thus a god who deceived everyone. "The disciple of Jesus, not be able to adduce anything respecting him that was obviously manifest, falsely assert that he foreknew all things."[22] For this reason, according to Nietzsche, institutional or ecclesiastical Christianity operates with a falsification of the gospel, just as Nietzsche asserts that the gospel died on the cross when ethical practice was forgotten in favor of doctrinal morality. In Celsus's arguments, we can witness a similar criticism, although he places greater emphasis on superstition as an example for such falsification as it becomes manifest in magic and the Kingdom of Heaven. There is, then, a contradiction at the core of Christianity as it combines elements from the ancient Greek and Jewish traditions. Christians do not demonstrate, or explain, the content of their doctrine, but instead they only teach a kind of faith. For Christians, human wisdom is foolishness before God.[23] As a consequence, Christian teachings are focused on divine wisdom, and such teachings can only be successful among the ignorant. This is why Nietzsche sees an urgent need to re-evaluate all values of modern culture, or as Oswaldo Giacoia Jr. reminds us: "One of

20 Roberto Machado, *Nietzsche e a Verdade*, Rio de Janeiro 1984, 100.

21 Celsus, *A Discourse Against the Christians*, IV, 69, 163.

22 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 9.

23 Karl Jaspers reflects on the contradiction that Christianity operates by turning man into God, when, in fact, God becomes man in Jesus: "That God has become man means that man should not seek his beatitude in the hereafter, but rather found his heaven on Earth" (Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche y el Cristianismo*, trans. Alberto Ciria, Barcelona 2021, 8).

the most striking aspects of Nietzsche's work lies in his devastating critique of the ideals and values revered by modern culture."[24]

Among Christian cultural idea, Celsus and Nietzsche are equally critical of the idea of the "son of God." Both Celsus and Nietzsche view this idea as nothing more than the exaltation of the vengeance of one who considered himself to be the son of God. Nietzsche adds that, with Jesus's death on the cross, Jewish vengeance once again comes into play:

> their vengeance was to extravagantly exalt Jesus, to separate him from themselves, as the Jews of old, in revenge against their enemies, had separated from themselves and elevated their God to the heights. The only God and the only son of God: both products of resentment (A 40).

> But the Christians argue sophistically, when they say that the son of God is *the world itself*. And the accusation is strengthened by this, that the world which was announced by the Christians to be the son of God, was not a pure and the holy *word*; but a man was most disgracefully punished and put to death.[25]

Man was created and placed in Paradise, but, because of sin, he was expelled to live in a place opposite to the Garden of Eden. The divinity of Jesus cannot be proven on the basis of prophecy, as it must indeed be proven, and this is also the case with regard to immortality:

> Christianity has waged a mortal war from the darkest corners of bad instincts against all feeling and reverence and distance among men, that is, against the assumption of all elevation, every growth of culture – with the resentment of the masses forging its main weapon against us, against everything noble, joyful, magnanimous on earth, against our happiness on earth … The "immortality" granted to every Peter and Paul has so far been the greatest, most malicious attack on noble humanity (A 43).

Christian sedition has led to the destruction of religion and civil society. Christians do not teach anything very wise, unlike Heraclitus, who understood what it meant to preach to a statue which is the same as preaching to a wall.[26] Neither God nor the hero is distinct from this. In Christianity, inertia is expressed in its weakness and inability to fight: "the corruption, the perversion of human instincts"[27] leads to a "resentment [that] itself becomes creative and generates values: the resentment of beings to whom the true reaction is denied, of deeds only by an imaginary revenge does it gain reparation" (GM I 10, KSA 5.270). The resentful one feels the need to turn outward, seeking in the external a basis for acting, instead of turning inward like one who creates values. Those who are resentful act as though they always have felt the need for an external arbiter to constrain their action, a kind of absolute. For this reason, they do not truly act but rather react.

24 Oswaldo Giacoia Jr., *O Leitor de Nietzsche*, Rio de Janeiro 2022, 10.
25 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 11.
26 Celsus, *A Discourse Against the Christians*, VII, 259.
27 Fink, *A Filosofia de Nietzsche*, 146.

This reactionary stance of those who are resentful should not be confused, however, with naivety and meekness, but it is rather related to perversion in the way in which Celsus understands the Christians' attitude of subverting civil laws and ordinances in order to establish their own. This point aligns with Nietzsche's observation that "the man of resentment is neither frank, nor naive, nor honest and straightforward with himself" (GM I 10, KSA 5.272). The resentful one's attitude is one of constantly seeking refuge in subterfuge, hiding and using intelligence as a powerful weapon through which their instincts and other natural characteristics are undermined. Likewise, he makes his capacity for not forgetting one of his greatest curses, so that, at all times, the insults and indignities recorded in his memory are continuously and permanently held before him, poisoning his actions and, by extension, the actions of others. If, according to Celsus, Christians are therefore seen to have an attitude of sedition toward civil authorities in the name of obedience to a supreme God, then this very attitude also ends up influencing the mass of people: "For of assemblies some are public, and these are conformable to the law of the land; but others are secret, and these are such as are hostile to the laws; among which are the Love Feasts of the Christians."[28] Christians, thus, also seek to direct others toward their own resentment. This needs to be done through a simple submission to faith in this one and almighty God[29] from whom they solely expect to receive something, thus exempting them from acting, since their own action means nothing before the magnitude of such a God. This same God always serves as a background to every action, so that the acting man no longer counts but only God for whom, to whom, and through whom one acts. God becomes the orchestrator of every action, stripping humans of any ability to create, creating nothing but hatred and revenge, properties typical of the resentful man.

Like Celsus, Nietzsche also refers to the struggle between Rome and Judea:

> "Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome": – there has never been a greater event than this struggle, this question, this moral opposition. Rome saw the Jew as something like anti-nature itself, as if it were its antipodal monster; in Rome, Jews were considered "guilty of hatred toward the whole human race" […]. As for the Jews, what did they feel toward the Romans? This can be understood from a thousand signs; but it suffices to recall John's Apocalypse, the wildest of invectives that revenge has in its conscience […] the deep coherence of the Christian instinct when it associated precisely this book of hatred with the name of the apostle of love (GM I 16, KSA 5.286).

Rome represents an aristocratic instinct that, in the multiplicity of gods, enables its citizens to indulge in a warrior instinct, which consequently results in nobility and elevation. For the Romans, individuals hold a place of prominence that is threatened by the Jewish hatred and revenge instinct. To prevent hatred from prevailing, it is necessary

28 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 1.

29 Claudio Moreschini, reflecting on Celsus's polemic against the Christians, observes "his refusal of the fact that God or the son of God has never descended or can never descend among men" (Claudio Moreschini, *História da Filosofia Patrística*, trans. Orlando Soares Moreira, São Paulo 2008, 98).

to counterattack the degenerate Jewish-Christian instincts, themselves expressed under the banner of love and altruism. To what extent does all this cultivation of love and altruism express itself in the form of resentment?

III Christian Denial of the World as an Effect of Resentment

Resentment[30] is expressed subtly. This is underscored by the allusions to love and meekness with which Christians have sought to justify their actions, but which, at their core, are driven by hatred and revenge and, therefore, by reaction. In this sense, Thomas Bertonneau's reference to the role played by revenge in the context of resentment is crucial: "Christianity shares with Judaism the ability to provoke resentment against its own persistent undermining of resentment. Nothing infuriates the critics of Judaism and Christianity [...] more than the gentle admonition to turn the other cheek."[31] Thus, as Celsus shows in his writings, in their sedition against the established order, Christians are involved in "persuading stupid auditors to believe in these miracles."[32] Nietzsche, in turn, finds resentment expressed through anarchism:

> resentment: today, this plant blooms most splendidly among anarchists and anti-Semites, [...] like the violet, though with a different scent. And as like will always breed like, it is not surprising to see emerging, precisely from these circles, attempts, as there have been enough already [...] to sanctify revenge under the name of justice [...] and then to promote, with revenge, all reactive affections (GM II 11, KSA 5.309–10).

Resentment establishes its presence through malice, hatred, and revenge and it is therefore connected to perversion, anarchy, and sedition. It is unbearable for the resentful to encounter the instinct of strength, the affirmation of life-promoting instincts.[33] In their hostility to life, the resentful find their main tool in the ascetic ideal executed by the ascetic priest:

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30 According to Keith Ansell-Pearson, resentment consists of a negative feeling against the oppressive master: "a reactive and negative sentiment against the oppressive masters which Nietzsche calls 'ressentiment" (Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morality*," in Pippin (ed.), *Introductions to Nietzsche*, 199–214: 205).

31 Thomas F. Bertonneau, "Celsus, the First Nietzsche: Resentment and the Case Against Christianity," *Anthropoetics: The Journal of Generative Anthropology* III/1 (1997), 1–14: 1.

32 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 14.

33 Ridley reflects on Christianity's contradiction of having placed itself against life: "Christianity failed by treating Christ as an exemplar, and thus falsifying the meaning of his 'way of life'" (Ridley, "Nietzsche: *The Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo*, *Twilight of the Idols*," 230).

> an ascetic life is a contradiction: here, a unique resentment dominates, that of an insatiable will to power that wishes to master, not something of life, but life itself, its larger, deeper, and fundamental conditions; here, an attempt is made to use force to block the source of strength; here, the gaze turns rancorous and treacherous against physiological flourishing itself (GM III 11).

The force the resentful use to attack the source and root of all strength consists in counterforce, in that movement of anarchy, of destabilizing the established order in favor of dismantling and unbalancing the order promoted by the strong, noble, and fortunate. Strength, nobility, and the good fortune of the nobles are unbearable to the resentful, which is why they do not act, as they show themselves to be incapable of acting, but instead react. This is reflected in hatred, in revenge, and "these [...] men of resentment" are "physiologically unfortunate and consumed, a whole world trembling with subterranean revenge, inexhaustible, insatiable in outbursts against the fortunate" (GM III 14, KSA 5.370). It is precisely in the cheerful and fortunate that the resentful seek to instill a sense of guilt as a disease that not only affects those who suffer from it, but, more than that, this disease spreads:

> "I suffer: someone must be guilty of this" – so thinks every sick sheep. But the ascetic priest, the pastor, tells them: "That's right, my sheep! Someone must be guilty: but you are that someone – only you are guilty of yourself!" ... This is bold enough, false enough: but with this, at least one thing is achieved, as I said, the direction of resentment is changed (GM III 15, KSA 5.375).

The direction is changed in the sense of turning backward, so that the direction of force becomes contrary, a counterforce. The ascetic priest uses concepts like guilt, sin, and sinfulness "to make the sick harmless to a certain extent, to make the incurable destroy themselves, to rigorously turn the lightly ill back toward themselves, turning resentment backward" (GM III 16). Sedition, according to Celsus's critique of Christianity, is motivated by a backward-directed force that "perverted the doctrines of the Greeks and barbarians,"[34] as Nietzsche highlights with regard to the phenomenon of resentment as a counter-feeling, a feeling turned backward. Just as in sedition, resentment is driven by a counterforce and, for this very reason, it does not build, it does not create, it only degenerates. In the words of Robert B. Pippin, resentment promotes a decadent physiology: "That is why Nietzsche's images of modernity are physiological images of a final or decisive exhaustion and illness."[35] As in Celsus, sedition functions as a disease and exhaustion of life, as a "slave rebellion in morality: creative resentment. The crushed, oppressed, denied the real reaction" (Nachlass 1887, 8[4], KSA 12.334). Beyond their failure to perceive that they are merely engaged in a reaction, those who suffer from resentment also perform an inversion: "trying to interpret one's resentment as

34 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 23.

35 Robert B. Pippin, "O suposto adeus de Nietzsche: o Nietzsche pré-moderno, moderno e pós-moderno," in Bernard Magnus / Kathleen Higgins (eds.), *Nietzsche*, trans. André Oídes, São Paulo 2017, 301–32: 308.

virtue (sense of justice), one's anxious humility as 'humility,' inoffensive 'cowardice'." Thus, once again, as previously noted, resentment acts subtly, so that it is not identified as such, but as something opposite to what it really is, as in the case of Rousseau and Victor Hugo, as Nietzsche noted in a letter: "Victor Hugo, all the romantics, even the most refined romantics, like the Goncourt brothers are all merciful to the mafia-masked Rousseau – I suspect that something of the mafia's resentment can be found at the heart of romanticism itself" (letter to Heinrich Köselitz, November 24, 1887, no. 958, KSB 8.203–4).

The movement of sedition imposed by Christians against the established civil order – sedition conducted, according to Celsus, stealthily, in darkness, subtly – maps onto the resentment that Nietzsche discovers in the romantics, who, under an image of mercy and compassion, act like a "mafia" in order to undermine the foundations of established structures. "But, according to the Christians, the son of God is punished by the devil, who also punished us in order that through this we may be exercised in endurance."[36] Once again, sedition and resentment appear side by side as movements that infiltrate with the intent to dismantle, rupture, belittle, and denigrate. The subtlety with which these manifestations are felt through representative slogans of messianic promises inevitably leads their victims into their trap.

Magic, according to Celsus's, is one of the tactics Christianity has employed since its founder, Jesus. As in those cases of healings, resurrections, and the multiplication of bread that are narrated in the Gospels, many adherents of Christianity are eager to solve their problems through an interventionist escape like magic.[37] Such magic interventions act as a deviation from the natural standards that govern life in order to open up a dimension beyond life. Therefore, Christians separate themselves from the natural order, establishing another order, the supernatural order, guided by the idea of a "Kingdom of God." Those who are weary of this world, of life, and who consider themselves incapable of acting in this world, surrender to an idea that denies the world, which itself leads to that kind of hatred of, and repulsion from, life that comes to the fore in the backward feeling of resentment, a feeling that aims at another world, the Kingdom of God itself. The latter emerges as a domain that denies the world in favor of an afterlife, thus leading to a rupture with the world of life.

In defending the Roman Empire, Celsus also defends the polytheistic religion of the empire. The diversity of divinities, according to Celsus, is much more realistic than Christian monotheism since it is able to accommodate the diversity of people that comprise the empire. In contrast, Jewish-Christian monotheism ultimately evades the realism

36 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 28.

37 According to Moreschini, it seems that "Celsus had a certainly not superficial awareness of his Christian adversaries and their fundamental doctrines. For example, he was well-informed – to the point of making it a basic issue of his anti-Christian polemic – about the Jewish origin of Christianity and the reason that provokes the separation between Jews and Christians, namely, their different opinion about the coming of the Messiah prophesied by the Scriptures" (Moreschini, *História da Filosofia Patrística*, 101).

advocated by Celsus, and it forces the diversity of people to conform to a single God who is alien to their way of life. Jewish-Christian monotheism acts by displacing that which is genuine and authentic in each person's life, forcing them to partake in an anti-realism. This phenomenon, according to Nietzsche, translates into a herd morality and, consequently, into the denigration of the human animal, depriving it of its *tópos*: the earth, situating it in a beyond that is opposed, and even hostile, to everything that inspires life in this world. To borrow Celsus's terminology, it commits true sedition, a rupture with demands of the world and of life in order to surrender to an otherworldly realm, fictitious and devoid of lived experience. Without the enjoyment of experiences proper to the world of life, one experiences a non-creative backward feeling, a feeling of resentment, instead of experiencing a truly creative feeling – a forward-directed feeling.[38]

While feeling is characterized as an experience of fullness in each lived moment, resentment is characterized by an experience of closure and rupture in which life is not understood in its full scope but in a headless segmentation, where nothing is created. In resentment, forces are not promoted, and thus everything degenerates, since forces are only creative when they are directed outward, whereas their inward turn leads to degeneration. While true feeling unites, resentment separates, making the movement of creation incapable and impotent. By opposing the instinctual world, Christians prevent the discharge of force, and nothing remains of the movement of creation but resentment and degeneration.

What creates values is an outward direction of forces that appears as a form of agency without external foundations. Without such external foundations, the creation of values also foregrounds the source of this agency: it is a movement toward the self that, in addition to creating values, also is a movement toward the affirmation of life. Turning toward oneself implies a movement contrary to Celsus's criticism of what he views as Christian sedition: "For as most of these are depraved characters, who deceive the vulgar, and persuade them to assent to whatever they please, this also take place with the Christians."[39] In contrast, turning toward oneself is equivalent establishing unifying bonds, to fostering an organic totality. The latter can only exist to the extent that it is supported by true feeling, experiencing things in their depth and fullness. On the other hand, resentment causes alienation from oneself and therefore rupture and

38 On the resentment that can be inferred from the invention of the death of the son of God, Adele Monaci Castagno says: "Celsus introduces a prosopopoeia when he makes a Hebrew speak, in his place, who addresses Jesus directly with a first speech, criticizing his illegitimate birth, social and cultural poverty, and the fact that he is a magician and charlatan and not the son of God. The Hebrew then delivers a second speech against the Christians who came from Judaism for having abandoned the law of their fathers, for having believed that the son of God was a criminal with an infamous death and for having invented stories to mask such a shameful event" (Adele Monaci Castagno, "Orígenes," in Angelo di Berardino / Giorgio Fedalto / Manlio Simonetti (eds.), *Dicionário de Literatura Patrística*, trans. José Joaquim Sobral, São Paulo 2007, 1305).

39 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 2.

division. In the political sense of Celsus's critique, Christianity ultimately contradicts its own principles in its assault on the state. Instead of creating unity with the Empire, it breaks with it; instead of feeling in unity with it, it resents it, as a dangerous rival who inflicts all sorts of misfortunes, when it could actually be seen as a stimulus to unleash an ever-greater quantum of forces. However, from the Christian perspective, this rivalry is read in moral terms, so that it becomes impossible to perceive the state as a provocative instance to unleash creation. Christianity prefers to break with the state, treating it as a hostile force that prevents the fulfillment of its capacities and potentialities. The state involves laws and regulations, as Walter Kaufmann noted in demonstrating how faith in Christ has operated as a kind of revenge among Jesus' followers, especially for Paul: "he conceived faith in Christ as a substitute. This was his 'escape' and 'perfect revenge' against the law and those who followed it."[40]

The Christian subversion of law and the state that Celsus characterizes in terms of sedition also appears when Nietzsche points out the reason for Jesus's condemnation to death.[41] The German term used is *Aufruhr*, which can be translated as disturbance, revolt against some established order. In this specific case, the established order is Judaism itself, the civil and religious institution responsible for organizing the social life of the time. For this reason, one asks: "'who killed him? Who was his natural enemy?' – that question burst forth like lightning. Answer: dominant Judaism, its highest class. In that moment, they felt in revolt against the order, they understood Jesus, in retrospect, as in revolt against the order" (A 40).

The sedition against the established order that Celsus attributes to Christians is attributed by Nietzsche not to Jesus himself but to the Jewish community's understanding of Jesus's actions, which Nietzsche regards as a misinterpretation. This becomes obvious in the following passage: "It is clear that the small community did not understand the main point, what was exemplary in this way of dying, the freedom, the superiority over all feeling of resentment" (A 40). When the Nietzsche mentions community, he refers to the community of disciples, thus the emerging Christian community, as the one that did not understand the death of its master. Therefore, their response was none other than resentment, revenge, and hatred expressed in the phrase "Kingdom of God" as a testament against the world, in the name of a Kingdom that is established beyond the earthly world of life. This rupture and sedition apply to the world as a whole, not merely to political institutions, as Celsus claimed: "And the accusation is strengthened by this, that the world which was announced by the Christians to be the son of God, was not the pure and hole *word*; but a man who was most disgracefully punished and put to death."[42] Sedition

40 Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, and Antichrist*, 4th edn., Princeton, NJ 1974, 344.

41 Jesus himself is, according to Karl Jaspers, instrumentalized by Christianity in order to fulfill its own ends: "Jesus is therefore not, for Nietzsche, the source of Christianity, but merely a means that Christianity uses, among others, to fulfill its own ends" (Jaspers, *Nietzsche y el Cristianismo*, 18).

42 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 11.

against the world in its entirety is marked by resentment as the ultimate expression of counter-feeling. The instinct of revenge drives, in Nietzsche's view, the Christian disciples of Jesus to implement sedition precisely because of their inability to grasp the scope of Jesus's redemptive act: "to offer themselves to a similar death, with mild and gentle peace in the heart" (A 40). This instinct for revenge gives rise to the need to separate as a punishment for the debt incurred. Thus, paying this debt is placed on the horizon of the Kingdom of God, on the horizon of an eschatological promise. For Celsus, this break with the with the reality of the world, and with the reality of civil society, in favor of a fictional reality located in a beyond relies on magic and other superstitions: "Certainly you Christians will not say, that Christ, when he found that he could not induce the inhabitants on the surface on the earth to believe in his doctrines [...] persuaded those that dwelt there."[43] Or as Nietzsche noted: "the Christian ideal as a caricature and degradation of divinity" (Nachlass 1887/88, 11[95], KSA 13.44). In this beyond – surpassing the earthly, sensible plane of life – "the 'Kingdom of God' will judge its enemies" (A 40).

It is against this background that one of the greatest contradictions emerges in the purest evangelical sentiment: if "the gospel was precisely the presence, the realization, the reality of this 'Kingdom of God'" (A 40), then Christians traded reality – earthly life of Jesus – for the promise of an eschatological future that will come to judge the present time, condemning it as the one responsible for Jesus's death. The sedition of Christians was carried out within life itself, which is the life of this world, exchanging it for a future life, located in a fictitious and fantastical dimension, called the "Kingdom of God," when, in fact, the evangelical Kingdom of God, in its most genuine sense, belongs to this world, against which no kind of sedition should be committed, under penalty of going against life itself. This standing against life is nothing more than a product of resentment: "The only God and the only son of God: both products of resentment" (A 40). Resentment is the movement of breaking with life itself, placing oneself in a position contrary to its affirmation, encompassing all kinds of ruptures as a negation of unity: "Christianity, Revolution, Slave Uprising, equal rights, philanthropy, love of peace, justice, truth: all these grand words have value only in struggle, as a banner" (Nachlass 1887/88, 11[135], KSA 13.62). The earthly life of Jesus can be seen as the greatest testimony to a unity between God and the human being, which does not allow for sedition, nor for feelings contrary to this unity, such as resentment. The countermovement, which produces resentment, constitutes one of life's main opponents.

By provoking all sorts of divisions, resentment prevents strength, the fundamental ingredient for fostering creation. This movement of creation is directed forward, aiming to continuously produce good news. The movement of creation combats everything that leads in the opposite direction of strength, such as feelings of guilt, revenge, and sin: "Jesus had abolished the very concept of 'guilt' – he denied any gulf between God and man, he lived this unity of God and man as his 'good news'" (A 41). The life and testimony

43 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 12.

of Jesus, unlike the movement originating from him and corroborated by his disciples, was directed toward consolidating unity. And this unity is made present by Jesus's own life in this world, with all its events and vicissitudes, including those that might seem trivial or meaningless. Jesus made each gesture and word a testimony of complete life, which invites one to accomplish everything, from helping an animal that falls into a pit on the Sabbath to paying taxes to Caesar. For this reason, Jesus's testimony does not reveal any trace of dissent or sedition, nor does it display any mark of resentment. On the contrary, his whole life, each concrete gesture and word, constitutes an affront to sedition and resentment. Christianity, understood as Christendom, constitutes a denial of Christlikeness or Christianity: the Christian fact, its most original and genuine dimension. This originality cannot be reduced to a solipsistic rationality that tends to subject everything to the criterion of truth, using logical-rational mechanisms that are therefore distant from singular experiential reality: "Reducing the fact of being Christian to Christendom, to taking it as true, to a mere phenomenality of consciousness, means denying Christianity" (A 39). What is genuinely Christlike is irreducible to rationalizing and moralizing mechanisms, since it passes through a concrete experience that is unique, singular, and therefore translates life into its dimension of indissoluble unity in which no trace of sedition has a place.

When we speak of unity, some important clarifications are necessary. Unity cannot be confused either with the sum of parts, in the sense of a set of differences simply placed side by side, nor as a homogeneous mass, in which the differences of the parts have been lost. Rather, unity is distinguished by the dimension of differences that show themselves as differences in continuous interaction, marked by struggles for mastery, which constitute the guarantee of strength. This struggle among differences for mastery finds a serious threat in Christian morality as it imposes order to maintain pacification and to achieve equality. Now, from this conformist and passive pacification, no stimulus can be generated that would lead to the release of strength. For this reason, the outcome of this passivity ends up being instinctual deterioration and degeneration, that is, illness.[44] And those affected by this illness have no choice but to rupture, motivated not by strength but by counterforce, stemming from envy and malice, typical of those who, feeling incapable of a movement of overcoming, harbor resentment.

Therefore, the unity presented above refers to the movement of strength that overcomes sedition and separation by acting at the very source where feelings are generated, neutralizing resentment and fostering feeling in its proactive dimension. In this sense, if Christians, as Celsus argues, directed sedition against the Empire out of a feeling of incapacity, then they themselves ended up feeling victimized by the system

44 Passivity and instinctual degeneration create a sick disposition, typical of the various mechanisms used by Christians: "Christianity absorbed the teachings and rites of all the underground cults of the Roman Empire, with all the absurd variations that a sick reason invents" (Jaspers, *Nietzsche y el Cristianismo*, 20).

they put in place. As Celsus puts it: "For the wisdom of the world is bad, but the folly is good."[45] "Original Christianity is the abolition of the state" (Nachlass 1887/88, 11[239], KSA 13.93). The result of this endeavor could be nothing other than resentment. Likewise, if Christians, according to Nietzsche, place themselves in a position of seeking affirmation through weakness and passivity, then their engine of action is malice and envy toward the strong. Morality acts to prevent them from confronting the situation and placing themselves in a position to seek transcendence. Therefore, morality constitutes one of the main factors hindering the achievement of unity, the essential factor for overcoming sedition and resentment.

Conclusion

Celsus's and Nietzsche's respective critiques of Christianity converge in many of their central claims. These similarities mainly come to the fore with regard to Christianity's sectarian dimension which primarily arises from the rejection of all earthly things and the political order of Empire. What takes the place of earthly things is the exaltation of a religious kingdom Celsus and Nietzsche equally consider to be an illusion, either in terms of magic, as in Celsus[46], or in terms of falsehood (*Falschheit*), as in the case of Nietzsche.[47] Christianity's threat to life is central to both Celsus's and Nietzsche's critiques, and this threat becomes particularly obvious in the way Christianity attributes supernatural effects to Jesus and his followers. For Celsus, Christianity acts as a counter-force "corrupting human life,"[48] and for Nietzsche, Christianity is a vehicle for "otherworldly" ideas that destroy life (A 58). In contrast, both Celsus and Nietzsche view in the Roman Empire an affirmation of life: "the great yes to all visible things, like the Imperium Romanum, visible to all senses, the grand style, no longer only art, but made reality, truth, life" (A 59). Life, through the Roman Empire, has reached a high level of affirmation, and anything that stands in the Empire's way, such as Christianity, ultimately stands against life itself, as the Empire is one of life's sources of expression. Nietzsche even considers Christianity "the vampire of the Imperium Romanum" (A 58) – a vampire whose own source of vitality depends on weakening the Empire through his own weakness. Weakness, degeneracy, and sickness lie at the foundation of a fragmented conception of life, where a part within life is elevated as the supreme value, to the detriment of the other, which is subordinated as indecent, sinful, and excessive.

The result of this fragmentation of life is life turning against itself, and its organic totality, responsible for activating its forces, ends up being neutralized. The understand-

45 Celsus, *Arguments of Celsus*, 3.
46 Celsus, *A Discourse Against the Christians*, 1,6b, 65.
47 See, i. e., A 9, A 38, A 46, A 52 and A 62.
48 Celsus, *A Discourse Against the Christians*, 1,20c and d, 77.

ing of life as an affirmative organic totality is a common aspect driving Celsus's and Nietzsche's respective critiques of Christianity. However, there are also some points of divergence among Celsus and Nietzsche, such as their understanding of the institution of the state, the Roman Empire. Although both authors side with the state and against Christianity, it is only Celsus who truly values the state as an important institution for affirming life in its various aspects and dimensions. For Nietzsche, the state, or, as he calls it, the *Imperium Romanum*, is itself a concrete manifestation of nihilism. As such a product of nihilism, the state therefore cannot facilitate any movement toward overcoming sedition and resentment. Instead, the institution of the state, as could also be said of the religious institution, the Roman Church, serves only as a palliative mechanism among those contributing to the overcoming of nihilism: "Cesare Borgia as pope … Understand me? Very well, this would have been the victory I now long for –: with it, Christianity would be abolished!" (A 61) In this passage, Nietzsche appears to praise the Renaissance Roman Church, but let us be cautious: this apparent praise only serves as a counterpoint to Luther's ecclesiastical model, centered on the Gospel's word, as a kind of revival of authentic Christianity.

Even though Nietzsche, at times, appears to take up the banner of an authentic Christlike aspect of Christianity, this is not based on a theology of the cross, guilt, and transcendence, but it is instead focused on a practice rooted in valuing and affirming life in all its dimensions. As such, the Roman Empire also expresses aspects of organic life, struggle, strength, and striving for growth and mastery – a kind of incarnation of the will to power. The problem lies in the presence of typically moralizing elements, which appear to some extent in all institutions. These elements tend to lead the institution toward rigidity, causing it to stop advancing toward enabling new possibilities. Thus, in Nietzsche, we can observe how strongly the mark of nihilism permeates the various mechanisms that make up the social fabric. What can still be done, from Nietzsche's perspective, is to move toward minimizing the indelible influence of nihilism. Although political institutions are committed to providing a grand affirmation for all things, they present no eschatological promise. After all, rooted in the world of life, institutions cannot transcend the limits of the very world circumscribed by nothingness. Thus, by promising nothing, institutions fulfill the same role as Buddhism, which "does not promise, but fulfills" (A 42).

In Buddhism, there is no promise to be fulfilled in the future. Instead, Buddhism accomplishes the experience of fullness in the present moment of life. In this way, an institution like the Roman Empire, or the Catholic Church, with all its pomp, taste, and style for beauty and ostentation capable of satisfying the senses, represents the victory of a grand "yes" to life in the present moment, reveling in fullness: "it seems to me that a divine art is at work here, so diabolically divine, that we would search in vain through the millennia for another possibility like it, I see a spectacle so rich in meaning, so marvelously paradoxical, that all the gods of Olympus would have reason for immortal laughter" (A 61). Institutions, such as the state and the Church, act in the world of life as a spectacle, fulfilling their role of providing an excessively sublime quantum of refined

beauty and art. But they act in the present duration of the spectacle, without surpassing the moment in which life demonstrates its maximum expression of strength: now, if this is expressed only for a brief moment, albeit a full moment, then it is necessary to seize each moment of life to the fullest.

Nietzsche even seems to lend himself to an interpretation pointing to utilitarianism when he emphasizes the importance of fully enjoying each moment of life. However, this utilitarian reading appears to fade when he points to the absence of a specific goal to be achieved. Here, once again, we notice a certain distance from Celsus's view, for whom institutions, whether religious or civil, hold a true purpose within the life of the world. Celsus, unlike Nietzsche, is considered a nationalist. In this sense, the institution of the state is fundamental. Although he in many ways shares Nietzsche's critique of morality, Celsus diverges from Nietzsche drastically by adhering to a kind of nationalist conception of social life. This is because nationalism carries a typically herd-like mark, which, in Nietzsche's eyes, acts as one of the main expressions of morality, infusing the flock with the poison of its prescriptions and stripping individuals of their unique characteristics: instinctual drives, genius, and the capacity to create. Now, if Celsus questions a type of nationalism – Christianity, for he considers it a crude copy of Socratic and Platonic philosophy – he ends up instituting another type of nationalism, governed by the institutional dictates of the state. The latter consists of fantastical elements attributed to it by those who bow before it in a gesture of idolatrous worship. For this reason, the state acts in people's lives as a sort of cold monster, imposing commandments and ordinances that rob and strip each individual's individuality.

Herd nationalism, as Nietzsche understands it, presided over by a state that acts as a cold monster, generates subordination and herd conventions, stripping away the creative genius of the individual. The features of the state end up reproducing the features of Christianity. Thus, when Celsus criticizes Christianity to strengthen the *Imperium Romanum*, he merely changes the names, whereas the basic problem remains. For this reason, Celsus cannot carry his critique of Christianity to its ultimate consequences as Nietzsche does. Instead of substituting Christian institutions for the state, Nietzsche seeks to undermine all elements responsible for the constitution of a social aggregate devoted to issuing moral ordinances. Although Celsus, even within his historical context, conducts a revolutionary critique of Christianity, he ultimately retains all the moral principles of Christianity, safeguarded by the state. His critique therefore cannot dismantle the principles that establish and sustain Christianity at its roots.

This is the reason why Nietzsche goes further in his critique of Christianity, as he undermines the foundations that have given rise to Christian morality and that have also left traces in other, non-religious spheres, such as art, politics, and science. However, the fact that Nietzsche goes further in this critique of Christianity does not mean he is more accurate than Celsus. Celsus's critique of Christianity, which rattled its religious foundations, while emphasizing its political dimension, shows more clearly how Christians break the established social order by introducing another order, the order of magic. The latter is seen by Celsus as an order forged by the force of trickery, fantasy, and decep-

tion, as it surpasses nature and reason, which any respectable critique would have to adhere to. Celsus is focused on the preservation of the state, so anything that represents a threat to it must be countered.

Therefore, it is in the name of preserving, maintaining, and exalting the state that Christianity, motivated by all sorts of seditious and base actions, must be neutralize, and Celsus's critique of Christianity follows the paths of logic and rationality. On the other hand, Nietzsche's critique, due to its radical nature, fails to observe the criteria of logic and rationality, which any critique must minimally consider. In some way, Nietzsche's excessive critical radicalism can be explained by the fact that his critique undermines reason itself – which ultimately renders his critique obscure, thus making it difficult to evaluate the extent to which his critique is properly justified. This lack of clarity in Nietzsche's approach once again leads to a favorable vote for Celsus's critique of Christianity. What Celsus lacks in terms of radicalism, rhetorical style, and creativity, Nietzsche has in excessive abundance, to the point of becoming obscure and difficult to comprehend.

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